



U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Transit Administration



Dots & Dashes: Piecing Together Transit's Future

Background

Funded through a grant from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA)'s Public Transportation Participation (PTP) pilot grant program, Dots & Dashes was developed by the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) to provide an opportunity for Delaware Valley residents and stakeholders to discuss and express their priorities for future investments in public transportation through a fun, hands-on game setting. Consistent with the objectives of the PTP program, Dots & Dashes was designed as a self-contained and branded package replicable by planners in other regions. In the simplest terms, planners interested in replicating the exercise need only to adjust the scales of the game board and game pieces to match their local area, as well as scale costs necessary to account for different time horizons or local project costs.

Objectives

Dots & Dashes is an interactive board game that is used at public planning meetings to engage stakeholders in long range transit planning. Groups of three to six people use game pieces with monetary values to choose the priorities of transit projects. The intent of this project was to bring a "bottom-up" style of public engagement to Delaware Valley residents and stakeholders for their long range public transit planning project.

Findings and Conclusions

The use of Dots & Dashes helps stakeholders gain a better understanding of transit planning, project negotiation, and regional considerations.

A board game was developed to both review group preferences and to teach its participants about negotiations and constraints within the planning process. In playing Dots & Dashes, stakeholders express their preferences for public transit investments and are also educated about the planning process. Results of a participant survey indicated that respondents gained a better understanding of transit planning and a better understanding of project negotiation and regional considerations. Dots & Dashes successfully fulfilled its original objectives in providing meaningful outreach for DVRPC's long-range planning for transit. It condenses conceptually much of the transportation planning process so that it becomes possible for a lay audience in about an hour to engage in planners' decision making. As a result of Dots & Dashes, planners are informed of participants' priorities for investments, and participants leave more informed of the difficult tradeoffs that govern decision making.

Additionally, this unique method of public outreach introduced DVRPC's profile and mission to a new audience, individuals who may not have fully known of DVRPC's role in regional and transportation planning. As a result, new interest has been generated in DVRPC's other public outreach programs, such as the standing Regional Citizens Committee (RCC).

Benefits

This method of public outreach is beneficial to participants as well as planners in that it captures regional priorities, educates stakeholders regarding the tradeoffs required to compose a plan, and provides consensual input into the public transit planning process. The framework of Dots & Dashes is flexible enough that local planners may consider further adapting the game for local preferences. Through a permanent Web presence (<http://www.dotsanddashes.org>) that details Dots & Dashes' background, development, and results, it fulfills the central mission of the PTP pilot grant program: it is replicable by planners in other regions.

Project Information

FTA Report No. 0044

This research project was conducted by the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission. For more information, contact FTA Community Planner Tomika Monterville at (202) 366-5038, Tomika.Monterville@dot.gov. All research reports can be found at www.fta.dot.gov/research.